



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

July 22, 2005

News Release

TWO MEXICAN MEN SENTENCED TO 6½ YEARS FOR TRANSPORTING ILLEGAL ALIENS RESULTING IN TWO DEATHS

DENVER — Two illegal aliens were sentenced today to six and one-half years in prison following their plea agreement for alien smuggling resulting in two deaths, announced Bill Leone, acting U.S. Attorney for the District of Colorado, and Jeffrey Copp, special agent-in-charge of the Denver office of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Jose Angel Crispin-Diaz, 38, and Leonardo Cordova-Perez, 18, were sentenced by U.S. District Court Judge Walker D. Miller today for transporting aliens unlawfully present in the United States for financial gain resulting in death. Crispin-Diaz and Cordova-Perez were each sentenced to serve 78 months in federal prison. Both defendants were also ordered to jointly pay restitution of \$73,206 to Saint Anthony Hospital. Both men remain in custody.

According to the plea agreement entered April 20, the defendants, both illegal aliens, separately traveled from their homeland in Mexico to the United States in March. Cordova-Perez paid a smuggler to get him into the United States. Once in the U.S., the smuggler asked him to drive a truck containing illegal aliens to Florida, Arkansas and Alabama. Cordova-Perez also agreed to collect money from the families of the smuggled immigrants once he dropped them off at their destinations. The smuggler gave him \$499 to pay for gasoline, and a list of passengers who were to make the trip. By agreeing to drive and collect the money, Cordova-Perez would not have to pay the smuggler \$600 that he still owed.

When Crispin-Diaz arrived in Phoenix, he agreed to assist Cordova-Perez driving the truck. He was going to be paid \$500 for driving. Both defendants knew that the passengers were illegally in the United States, and that it was illegal to drive them.

Cordova-Perez picked up 21 other illegal immigrants March 11 and left Phoenix, driving a 1991 white Chevrolet pickup truck. Fourteen people sat in the rear bed of the pickup truck inside a camper shell. Eight people sat up front in the cab area. Cordova-Perez drove into Colorado, and at about 4 a.m. March 12, changed places with Crispin-Diaz and began driving along U.S. Highway 160.

At about 6:20 a.m. that same day, the truck was involved in a one-vehicle rollover crash, which occurred on U.S. Highway 160 eastbound, near the summit of Wolf Creek Pass. Colorado State Patrol (CSP) investigators later determined that the roads were dry and the weather was sunny with clear visibility. The CSP also determined that the truck was traveling at 75 miles per hour and that the advisory speed limit for the curve near the crash was 30 miles per hour, with a posted speed limit of 45 miles per hour.

One passenger, Jonas Medina-Ovardo, died at the scene. Another passenger, Carmelo Luna-Guzman was flown to St. Mary's Hospital in Grand Junction, Colo., where he died the next day from his injuries. The remaining passengers were taken to area hospitals or flown to Swedish Hospital in Denver or San Juan Regional Medical Center in Farmington, N.M.

Further investigation by ICE special agents determined that the passengers paid between \$1,100 and \$1,800 to be driven within the United States.

"The many emergency personnel who responded to the scene of this horrific accident deserve recognition and praise," Acting U.S. Attorney Bill Leone said. "I also want to recognize the hard work of the Colorado State Patrol, ICE agents, and the federal prosecutors who worked to hold those responsible for this crash accountable."

"To maximize their profits, these two alien smugglers overloaded their smuggling truck with 21 aliens resulting in two deaths and numerous severe injuries," said Jeffrey Copp, special agent-in-charge of the Denver Office of Investigations with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). "To smugglers, the profit is their highest priority; they have no regard for the lives of the people they're smuggling, and those who travel on the roads with them."

ICE special agents investigated this case with assistance from the Colorado State Patrol. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Suneeta Hazra and James Candelaria prosecuted the case.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.